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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the mass media causes black youths to indulge in the myth that success in school athletics is the key to fame and financial security, and that the public library offers blacks many resources which can be used to supplement their education. It is also held that libraries have historically been inhospitable to blacks and that public library services must be readjusted to meet the needs of minorities. Seven references are cited. (FM)

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The Black Child, the World of Sports, and the Public Library: A Personal Observation.

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ABSTRACT

It appears that a significantly large numbers of us (blacks) presently place far too much emphasis on sports as a catalyst for upward mobility. Continuous media images of equality, fame and financial security have led numerous black children to say, "I don't need school 'cause I'm gonna be a super jock!" ... Arthur Ashe, in an article concluded that "for every hour you spend on the athletic field, spend two in the library." Serious attention must be given to the myth which presently exist in the black community regarding education through sports.

The Public Library, the Black Child and the World of Sports: A Personal Observation

Tennis great Arthur Ashe in an open letter to black parents published in the New York Times in 1977, gave a much needed discourse to black parents. Ashe reviewed the state of the art of a black child's changes of succeeding to the ranks of super stardom in professional sports. He recounted biographically some of the high points of his illustrious career as a "first" in the tennis world. Bascially he emphasized that only one black child in a thousand would probably reach the major league level in a professional sport.[1] It appears that a significantly large number of us (blacks) presently place far too much emphasis on sports as a catalyst for upward mobility. Continuous media images of equality, fame and financial security have led numerous black children to say, "I don't need school 'cause I'm gonna be a super jock!" As much as I understand exactly what Ashe has stated, I likewise understand what the letters of response presenting the opposing points of view were emphasing.[2]

We live at a time in which it is popular to be a "free spirit". Persons who choose to be parents can barely wait until their offspring become partially self-sufficient. Far too many black parents in particular do not seriously accept the responsibilities associated with being a parent. Many persons appear to feel that their responsibilities as parents diminish once the child is born. Thus the inexperienced, misguided child is left to fend for

itself, setting its own values and priorities. The world of sports, as seen on television, e.g., baseball, football, basketball, boxing, field and track become a utopia. The young unconsciously accept the assumed notion that "blacks make the best athletes". But what about the sports of hockey, auto racing, skiing, water sports, etc.? Most of these sports twenty years away from the year 2000 are still predominately non black. Therefore, when one views the total professional sports spectrum, the percentage of black athletes represented is relatively small! Unfortunately the culturally accepted principles of racial, economic and political discrimination forces us (blacks) into rigid patterns of occupational selections.

The statement made by Ashe that especially proved note worthy to me was his advice to parents and would-be-stars. He concluded that "for every hour you spend on the athletic field, spend two in the library".[3] This advice was especially of interest to me being black myself, possessing an enduring faith in black youth, and being a person who "was not supposed to amount to much".

Libraries particularly the public library, should be crowded with young, black students seeking knowledge to aid them in preparing for "life". Too often we (blacks) are passed on in high school and graduate only to find that all we have to show for the educational experience is a "piece of paper". Often time many of us would be hard pressed to read that "piece of paper" we are given at graduation ceremonies. However, obviously this is not the point at which our problems began. As Ashe reiterated in his open letter, our problem actually began back at home. As child development specialists will substantiate, an inadequate home life, an inferior "basic" education, and an undisciplined mind all add up to equal a life of misery.

The causes of these problems have been generally delineated in the aforetime mentioned discussion. However, an overview of the effects of these problems are still further examples of an environmental imbalance in the black community. Children, particularly black children, need role models in which to emulate. Too often if one were to totally believe television, our area of professional expertise would be confined to the sports arena. This particular pattern of thought appears to be especially portrayed accidentally or purposefully by the media on a regular basis.

According to statistics cited in the World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1980, children between the ages of 2-5 years averaged in 1979 a total of 31:23 hours of television viewing time.[4] Children between the ages of 6-11 years averaged 27:16 hours of viewing time.[5] Teen age males averaged 27:12 and females averaged 23:25 hours of viewing time.[6] These individual averages compared with 30:25 hours of viewing time for all persons within the combined categories cited in this analyses.[7] Thus it is easy to statistically conclude that the amount of time our young people spend viewing television is phenominally high! From these statistics it is easy to see the extent to which the young are heavily influenced by the media. What televised events statistically attract the greatest number of viewer? Sports events! Televised events such as the Super Bowl, NBA's Pro-Basketball Games, World Series, the Olympics and amateur sports attract a tremendous percentage of younger viewers.

As a result of excessive amounts of time spent viewing sports events, the names of Franco Harris, Lynn Swan, John Stallworth, Earl Campbell, Darrell Dawkins and other giants in sports soon become household names. Seeking to

emulate their feats of glory, the child consciously and/or unconsciously begins to dream of being just like their heroes. However, the critical question remains as to how do we prevent the 999 who do not succeed in the big time from ending up hustling drugs... or worse?

Parents and especially black parents, must begin at an early age to imbue their young with a sense of priorities. There is nothing wrong with being a highly skilled athlete as many of my heroes are. However, there is something wrong with acquiring fame but being unable to speak coherently in public, or even worse, being unable to manage one's assets. To accomplish the task of coherent public speaking and the management of one's assets, an education is definitely required!

Education and the Black Athlete

As much as I value the formal education I have received, the "street wise" education I also received complimented the formal instruction. For many black athletes, fame in the sports arena has been the only way they could achieve access to a formalized education. Had it not been for their ability to succeed in sports, their lives might have been the reverse of what they presently are. I agree with Ashe regarding his statement that "while we are 60 percent of the National Basketball Association, we are less than 4 percent of the doctors ... While we are 35 percent of the major league baseball players, we are less than 2 percent of the engineers".[8] Nevertheless, we can still channel young people into the sciences but it does not have to be at the expense of the sports or entertainment fields.

A college education is not for everyone and certainly everyone should not strive toward a college career. There is a well deserved place in our society for those persons who acquire a skill, e. g., mechanics, carpenters, brick masons, plummers, electrians. Even college graduates and big time super stars need the services of these craftmen. So let us not be completely overwhelmed by the band wagon that states, "all of us (black) must go to college to be a success".

The Public Library and Black Youth

The public library as a vehicle for upward mobility does offer black youth a chance to bridge the literary world they might have missed in high school. The treasures of the library are perhaps much more meaningful to those young people who had the unique opportunity to grow up with literary resources. However, a large number of us did not have the parental guidance nor social integration necessary to cultivate this early habit. Therefore, we grew up missing and unaware of the potential services the library could and does provide for us. For many urban youth, the public library symbolizes a cold, rigid inflexible institution dominated and geared to serve the elite or middle class. These youth often see few if any of their nationality in decision-making positions. As a result, the desire to emulate a role model goes unfulfilled.

Historically, the

> relationship of the library to the lower classes and one barely touched on by historians is that of service to non whites by a profession that has been predominantly white, if not plainly racist, in orientation and composition.[9]

According to one of the latest calculations, statistical facts pertaining to black librarians and libraries in 1976 were as follows:

Total number of black librarians in the U.S.	7,800
Total number of male black librarians in the U.S.	1,080
Total number of female black librarians in the U.S.	6,720
Total number of black librarians heading a state library agency	1
Total number of blacks heading a predominantly black ALA-accredited library school	3
Total number of black directors of major public library systems	4
Total number of blacks who direct a major research library serving a predominantly white research community	1
Total number of black libraries granted membership in the Association of Research Libraries	1
Total number of black female directors of predominantly white university libraries	1
Total number of black male directors of predominantly white university libraries	1
Total number of black academic libraries that were recipeints of federal grants in FY 1975[10]	75

It is all but impossible to extricate librarians and the services associated with library resources from the total educational processes. Thus many of the problems affecting blacks in educational institutions likewise affect the library resources available to blacks.

It was not long ago (1950's and 1960's) that blacks were systematically denied access to libraries throughout the southern part of the United States. We were forced to use "libraries for Negroes" which were generally non existent or were represented by an obvious sub-standard excuse for even poor library service. On the other hand, other parts of the United States outside

of the south did not generally maintain legalized racially segregated facilities; however, other problems were readily apparent. Too often library facilities were inaccessable to urban dwellers due primarily to the library's physical location.

However, as the number of minority persons, particularly blacks, being employed in decision-making capacities, named to library boards, trustee boards and elevated to directorships increase, the quality of library services to the minority community is expected to be substantially increased.

Blacks and Library Services

Libraries, particularly those public libraries situated in urban settings, must develop new concepts of service to interface with their conventional listing of services. Innovative educational concepts presently in existence e. g. adult education programs, continuing education programs, and independent study programs require public libraries to readjust their accepted philosophies and practices. Although it appears likely that, for some time to come, public libraries will continue to face serious financial shortages, library futurists predict that future responsibilities will be thrust upon public libraries that will require a wide application of media. These predictions indicate that new demands will be made upon public libraries which will expand the application of films, video, audio, and other media resources in isolation or combination with printed resources.

Public libraries must respond positively to increasing demands for change originating from very diverse minority groups.

> It is crucial to redress the imbalance of financial resources between cities, which operate major libraries and information services, and the suburbs, which now make the greatest use of them.[11]

Robert Wedgeworth, the executive director of the American Library Association, speaking to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science in Chicago, in 1972 state that "libraries...are stuck at the "general store" stage when it's the era of the supermarket".[12] Wedgeworth went on to "suggest combining the collections of public libraries and junior colleges and stressed the need for a new vocabulary - understandable to both professionals and the general public - which could specify "social and economic indicators" to evaluate and the needs of libraries.[13]

Promises vs Reality

60 Minutes, February 3, 1980, touched upon the roots of documented exploitation of black collegiate athletes in a segment entitled "Losers".[14] Dan Rather interviewed several individuals including Professor Harry Edwards, Department of Sociology, University of California at Berkely.[15] Professor Edwards reaffirmed what this author and Ashe have already stated. Professor Edwards reiterated that an article of faith exists in the black community regarding education thru sports. Generally the sales pitch of professional recruiters and coaches when seeking black athletes usually indicate the offer of a scholarship will be forth coming. However, as long as an athlete has eligibility and is healthy, he has no major problems. The over riding fact resulting from these interviews conducted by Dan Rather, revealed that a great many college athletes should "never" have been graduated. As a direct result of this type of exploitation, six big universities have recently been

notified that they are guilty of commiting violations e. g., New Mexico and Oral Roberts Universities.[16] According to Dan Rather, statistics relating to situations of this type indicated that in some cases only 20% of college athletes per year ever graduate.[17] Many of those who do graduate have done so by taking a heavy load of "Mickey Mouse" courses.[18] These "abridged" or "padded" courses were chosen on the basis of providing the athlete with a course in which he would be assured of securing an above average grade. As a result of this type of self-centered exploitation, several black athletes including Randy Echols, have filed a suit alledging past wrong doing.[19] These gentlemen content in their litigation that their present educational circumstances are the fault of the educational institution at which they attend. These athletes contend that they were told to "stay healthy and don't worry about grades". As a result, they were graduated, but feel that they were victimized, resulting in their present feelings of being academically deficient.

As illustrated in the aforetime mentioned discussion, it is indeed most realistic and necessary for our youth to spend two hours in the library for every hour spent on the athletic field. Certain there isn't anything more demoralizing and heart breaking than to witness the demise of a black athlete's career. This demise is increasingly horrified whenever the fact is revealed that he never completed his academic requirements qualifying him for a profession. Let us never forget that knowledge is power! Our present opportunities to seek and obtain an education are far greater than any possibilities our grandparents ever dreamed of. Each succeeding generation must be compelled to move forward regardless of the obstacles! To a large extent, the system under which we live has no compassion for a "loser"! We don't deserve the title

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"loser". However, it is hoped that the exploitation of black youth by certain elements within the world of collegiate sports will be circumvented by the athlete's insistance upon an education guided by common sense.

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